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# A D D R E S S

ON THE

## SYSTEMATIC VISITATION OF THE POOR IN THEIR OWN HOMES AN INDISPENSABLE BASIS OF AN EFFECTIVE SYSTEM OF CHARITY

DELIVERED BY

*SIR CHARLES TREVELYAN*

ON THE 27TH OF JUNE

AT A CONFERENCE OF THE SOCIETY FOR ORGANISING  
CHARITABLE RELIEF AND REPRESSING MENDICITY

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# ADDRESS

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IN approaching this subject I feel unaffected anxiety. After many extremely useful and interesting discussions, we have at last arrived at the *root* of the matter. The outworks have been carried, and we find ourselves committed to a final struggle face to face with the stronghold of the enemy.

We have heard to satiety of the evil effects of profuse, indiscriminate charity; how it has attracted to the metropolis all who prefer to live at the cost of others rather than by their own labour; how it has created an army of professional mendicants—not merely, or principally, street beggars—but a demoralised multitude who spend their lives in going, with artfully devised tales of woe, from one charitable society and individual to another; and how, after all, the accomplished cheat is filled with good things while the deserving poor are sent empty away.

The Poor Law is eating still deeper into the vitals of our country. It does not even *profess* to improve the condition of the poor, so as to hold out a hope, however distant, of the ultimate extinction of pauperism, or at least of its reduction to a minimum. In its character the Poor Law is essentially

mechanical ; disregarding the infinitely varied circumstances and feelings of the individual man ; taking no note of anything but the mere fact of destitution ; imposing the workhouse test on the able-bodied, and thereby breaking up the home, and breaking down the elevating and refining influences which emanate from it ; prescribing for widows and orphans, for the aged and infirm, a scale of outdoor relief barely sufficient to keep body and soul together, exhausting the strength, and precluding all hope of a return to a self-supporting state—a scale which is at once insufficient and indiscriminate, and so imperfectly checked that the idleness of the country is maintained at the expense of its struggling industry. No distinction is made between the deserving and undeserving ; no attempt to discover and remove the causes of distress ; no appeal to children or other near relations. Sons and daughters who are doing well in the world deliberately neglect their parents in order to force them into the workhouse, and when they are there they hold no communication with them lest they should be charged with their keep. On the other hand, the actual or collusive desertion of families in order to throw them on the rates is becoming more and more a national habit. A reign of universal selfishness has been inaugurated ; to a fearful extent banishing forethought and self-denial, relaxing industry and self-respect, and extinguishing those relative family affections which sweeten and bind together human society. Can we wonder that the number of paupers in England has increased since 1860 from 844,633 to 1,032,300, and the expense of relief from 5,454,764*l.* to 7,673,100*l.* ; while in the Metropolis the increase in numbers has been from 85,368 to 120,827, and the increase in expense from 796,428*l.* to 1,415,233*l.* for 1869, and it has since still further increased ? The increase of the Poor Law expenditure in the Metropolis from 1864–5 to 1868–9 was 509,000*l.*, or 56 per cent. The largest increase in any other part of England was in the South-eastern counties, where it was 23 per cent. Even the Poor Law officials are forced to admit that this system is



corrupting the morals and swallowing up the resources of the country. Our brethren the Scotch have had the unusual advantage of seeing the development of two opposite systems in a single lifetime, and what they think of the Poor Law will be seen from the following summary of this branch of the subject in a report made in 1868 by a Committee, which included many of the ablest men in Scotland, on the ‘Condition of the Poorer Classes of Edinburgh and of their Dwellings, Neighbourhoods, and Families’ :—

Operation of the Poor Law as at present administered opposed to natural laws, and to the soundest principles of political economy, for it—

Makes the Industrious support the Idle.

Makes no distinction between poverty resulting from misfortune, and from vice.

Diminishes Industry.

Diminishes frugality, and provident habits.

Destroys the Ties of Relationship.

Lessens the Sympathy of the Wealthier for the Poorer Classes.

Destroys Sympathy between the Poor.

Destroys Moral Training of Children.

Tends to remove Working-Classes from the Country into the Town Districts, and to overcrowd the latter.

Tends to increase enormously the Number and Expense of the Poor. \*

These facts indicate a radical defect in our system of managing the poor. In what quarter, then, are we to look for a remedy for this gigantic, growing evil of pauperism? Let us, first of all, try the question by applying to it the test of *à priori* reasoning.

\* I am surprised at the decided opinion of the bad effects of the Poor Law to which I have been led by an attentive study of the subject, including a review of the miscellaneous experience of a long and busy life. But it is better that the truth should be spoken. Every moral and social evil has its appropriate remedy. As this malady is of a complex character, it requires a varied treatment; but a wise application of Christian charity in the mode recommended by the Founder of our religion, offers the best prospect of a restoration to health. ‘Pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father’ is not merely to keep ourselves ‘unspotted from the world,’ but also to ‘visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction;’ and our Saviour Christ ‘went about,’ not only ‘teaching and preaching the gospel of the Kingdom,’ but also ‘healing all manner of sickness and all manner of disease among the people.’

In this, as in other things, knowledge is power. Before a physician determines upon a remedy, he makes a careful diagnosis of the disease. Is this malingering, or a genuine case for relief; and, if it is a genuine case, what treatment will soonest restore, and most permanently maintain, the health of the patient? These questions must be answered before any real good can be done.

Money and money's worth are only a part, and by no means the most important part, of what is required for the restoration of the patient. A sympathetic pressure of the hand; kind words of encouragement and advice; the very knowledge that a benevolent and influential friend is watching the case, to do any service in his power, have a reviving effect. We were all struck by the work done by Miss Octavia Hill in the poor neighbourhood taken in hand by her. How would it be, if, instead of a single unassisted lady, volunteers were systematically organised from the entire upper, and middle, and working class of the Metropolis, for the purpose of improving the condition of the lower class? The business habits of our merchants and bankers, the trained intelligence of our lawyers, the habits of command and administration of our civil and military officers, and the high qualities of the large body of retired public servants, who have acquired reputation in various parts of the world, would then all be brought to bear upon the reduction of the pauperism of London.

It is time that we should cease to do all our charity by proxy, and to think that we have discharged our duty to society when we have subscribed a five-pound note to a public institution. Who are to enquire into the individual cases of the swarm of neglected children who are the seed plot of future pauperism and crime? There are nearly 57,000 on the London out-door relief list alone, besides those maintained by charity, and the large street Arab class. It is idle to talk about national education, if no machinery is arranged for bringing this young proletaire rabble under proper training, before they qualify for the Reformatory or Prison, by breaking the law in so marked a manner as to become objects of interest.

How is overcrowding, with its degrading effect upon health and character, to be prevented; or proper drainage, ventilation, light, and water to be secured; or legal authority to be invoked for the removal of physical and moral nuisances, if attention is directed to these vital subjects only by fits and starts by a few uninfluential individuals?

Since the beginning of this century the gulf between rich and poor has become fearfully wide. The rich have become richer and the poor poorer. The proposal is to close this gulf, and to bring back the rich into such close relation with the poor as cannot fail to have a civilising and healing influence, and to knit all classes together in the bonds of mutual help and good will. Everything else would follow from this. There would be no necessity for pressing the adoption of remedial measures on the attention of the enlightened, public-spirited upper and middle class of London, when they were once made to understand the real evil and danger of the existing state of things by being brought into close contact with it. A thorough system of house to house visitation is not only an indispensable basis of every other improvement, but it must inevitably lead to those improvements.

To proceed from *à priori* reasoning to actual experiment, what do we find? The parochial system gave the first idea to Dr. Chalmers of the true mode of managing the poor of great towns. His aim was to make St. John's, Glasgow, like his old country parish of Kilmarnock. Many of us can speak from experience of the happy influence of the upper upon the lower class in rural parishes, where everybody is known, and everybody's welfare is consulted according to his special circumstances. But in towns the poor are so massed, that, in order to make an impression upon them, they must be subdivided into manageable sections under responsible visitors. This was Dr. Chalmers' plan, and it has been repeated wherever a serious effort has since been made to bring urban pauperism under control. It has been so at New York, Boston, Edinburgh, Elberfeld.

No plan of managing the poor has been better devised, or been more successful, than that which has been organised by the Jewish community in London, and has resulted in a marked improvement of the entire class of late years. The nature of the system will be understood from the following extract from Dr. Stallard's book upon London pauperism :—

Very early in their history, the Jewish Board of Guardians discovered the impossibility of treating their poor by pure officialism. It was easy to attend the Board, to hear the statements of the poor and the reports of the enquiry officers, and to administer relief on a scale to be determined by some arbitrary rule, or by the state of the exchequer; but they found that these operations were totally inadequate to make any real impression on the habits and character of the poor, and that a practical interest in their welfare must be shown, not only to elucidate the nature of the distress, too often concealed from official ears, but to administer the kind of assistance which was likely to relieve them best.

In the year 1861, therefore, the Board appointed twenty-five (now increased to thirty) gentlemen as a visiting committee, and in the first year of its existence 300 cases were confided to one or other of its members for special visitation. These gentlemen, having discovered that cases occur in which female investigation and advice are very necessary, invited the co-operation of some ladies of intelligence and experience, who kindly undertook to visit and report upon such cases when required to do so.

This visiting committee, although acting in complete harmony with the Board, does not usurp the power of relief; it informs and suggests, and, when deputed by the Board, it carries out that which is determined upon. Its first duty is to become intimate with the state and requirements of the poor committed to its charge. There are many cases of a complicated character which are much better investigated by private persons than by officials. The shame-faced poor—and it is significant that there are many amongst the Jews—have thus an opportunity of explaining misfortunes in secrecy and confidence, which it would be impossible to reveal in public to the officials and the Board; they appear, as it were, by counsel trusted by the court; their self-respect is preserved, and they are not necessarily humiliated by contact with the line of hardened poor who stand waiting at the doors. The counsel suggests the most appropriate treatment, which is rejected, modified, or adopted, as experience may dictate. And, lastly, the

visitor becomes the almoner of the Board, that the public bounty may be carried to the heart as well as the home of the recipient with a loving hand.

Each visitor takes a certain number of pauper families under his special care. He is required to visit them from time to time; he is to see that the applicant makes the most of his own resources; that his friends help him, and that no demand is made upon the funds of the Board until all the fountains of private charity have been opened up and exhausted. If employment only is wanted, the visitor is expected to help the applicant, by advice and influence, to obtain work. If emigration is desirable, he is to recommend it in the proper quarter, and see it carried out. If sickness be the cause of distress, the visitor must see that the patient is duly attended by the medical officers, or sent to the hospital where he is likely to obtain the advice and aid most suitable to his case. During the absence of the sick parent, he is to charge himself with the support of the mother and children, lest the home be broken up. And when the patient comes out of hospital, he is to see that he returns to his employment, withdrawing the assistance judiciously, that idle habits may not be fostered.

If the applicant be a widow, he is to see that she does not starve; he is to enlist sympathy on her behalf; he is to take care that her children be fed and sent to school, or to one of the asylums destined for their support. If of proper age, they are to be apprenticed to a trade; and it is his duty to see that the master also performs his duty towards them. And if the applicant be aged and worn-out, the visitor is to use his influence to get him admitted into a fitting almshouse, and to take care of him until he gets there. In this way, the visitor pledges himself to carry the poor person through his difficulties, whatever they may be, restoring the unfortunate to independence where it is possible to do so, and doing all he can to improve the physical and moral state of those who are confided to his care.

Edinburgh has been divided by the Association for Improving the Condition of the Poor into twenty-eight Sections, under as many Local Committees. Their plan is recapitulated in their last Annual Report as follows:—

Each Local Committee of a section shall consist of not less than five members, including the Chairman and Secretary.

Each Section shall be subdivided into *Divisions*, a member of the Local Committee acting as Special Visitor of each, in charge of the Division.

Each Division shall be parcelled out into *Districts*, each of which shall, if possible, contain not more than twelve families requiring regular visitation, having a Visitor assigned to each.

The Local Committee shall inform the Visitors as to their powers and duties, and the limitation of these, and shall supply them with Schedules, and give any assistance, advice, and information that may render their duties easy to themselves and useful to the Association.

The Special Visitor shall act along with the Ordinary Visitors in his Division in all difficult or doubtful cases, and in every case where relief is applied for, or appears to be required. In cases where he may consider it necessary to give relief before it is possible for him to consult his Local Committee, he is authorised to do so; but it will be his duty to report such cases, and every other case, on an Office Schedule or otherwise, at the earliest meeting of the Local Committee.

The Local Committee shall, through the Superintendent or otherwise, take the necessary steps for bringing before the Parochial (local Poor-Law) Board, or any of the existing Benevolent Institutions, the cases that seem to belong to them. As a rule, admitting of very few exceptions, persons in receipt of Parochial allowances are not objects for relief by the Association; neither are the permanently poor, for whom the Parochial rates are specially designed. When the allowances are obviously insufficient, the Local Committee ought to make application to have them increased. The sources from which information as to the character and antecedents of the families in the Section may be derived, are the Inspectors and Medical Officers of the Poor-Law Boards, the Superintendents of Police, the Parochial and all other Clergymen connected with the Section, all Missionaries, Bible-Women, Visitors of the Destitute Sick Society, and any other persons engaged in philanthropic efforts.

The Local Committee will consider the cases of those reported as out of employment, do what it can to obtain work for such, and, if unsuccessful, will report them to the Superintendent at the Central Office.

As a general rule, it will be the duty of the Local Committee to decide whether in any case material help should be given, and, if so, to fix its kind and quantity. In doing so, it will bear in mind—

- (1.) That the object of the Association is not to give relief to the idle or the vicious, or to any whose poverty is due to their own wilful and sustained misconduct.
- (2.) That the relief administered should be given in kind, and not in money—in articles least liable to abuse, in small quantities, proportioned to the immediate need—and should be discontinued as soon as the need ceases.

Each Local Committee shall be represented at the Acting (or general superintending) Committee by one of its Members, who shall be the regular medium of communication between his Section and the Acting Committee, and who shall be expected to keep himself informed regarding the condition and procedure of the Section which he represents.

### Elberfeld and Barmen

are divided into eighteen districts, and in each of these districts there are fourteen fathers, or armenpfleger, who each have five or six individuals allotted to them, whom they visit once in fourteen days. The armenpfleger are called to office by the community for a term of three years. They are not obliged to serve, but they consider it an honour to be called to such a duty; and I am informed that they scarcely, if ever, refuse to comply.

Of late this principle has begun to be applied to the Poor Law administration of London. The old, which is still unhappily the ordinary mode, is to make the relieving officers' districts so large that it is impossible for them to investigate all the applications for relief in detail, and to bring the whole of the cases before the entire Board of Guardians, so that only the most superficial and perfunctory attention can be given to them. Time will not admit of any real examination of the applicants for relief, and they are therefore dismissed almost as soon as they have been presented. But of late years, in the Poplar Union, the cases under the supervision of each relieving officer have been reduced from the average of 350 to about 150, and the Union itself has been subdivided into districts, each of which has been placed under the special responsibility of a committee, consisting of two or three Guardians. It has thus become possible to give individual attention to each case of application for relief. The relieving officer has time to investigate all the circumstances, and the Guardians themselves visit the poor in their homes. A minor advantage of this division of labour is that, instead of the whole body of Guardians sitting a whole day to make a very imperfect revision of the relieving officer's reports, they get through the work in a much more satisfactory manner in little more than an hour. The poor are better provided for; and it will be seen from the following statement that, instead of

the large increase in the number of paupers which has taken place in other metropolitan unions, there has been a decided decrease in the Poplar Union.

### POPLAR UNION.

*Number of Paupers in Receipt of Relief on the last day of the last Week in each Quarter of the following Years—  
1867, 1868, 1869 and 1870.*

Parochial Years	Christmas Quarter Number of Paupers	Lady-day Quarter Number of Paupers	Midsummer Quarter Number of Paupers	Michaelmas Quarter Number of Paupers
1866-7	6,954	10,172	7,858	5,974
1867-8	9,612	8,977	7,917	6,833
1868-9	7,333	7,541	5,870	5,477
1869-70	5,903	6,703	5,168*	

It may perhaps be said that the number of poor is so vast in London as to be totally unmanageable. But large regions of the metropolis are inhabited by the upper and middle classes, and do not require to be visited ; and, if the poor are numerous, the rich are at least in equal proportion. There is a vast fund of stray benevolence in London, seeking for investment. If the principle of house to house visitation is resolved upon, the six or seven Metropolitan Relief Associations must close their ranks and concentrate their forces ; and an enormous amount of voluntary agency, which is now frittered away on miscellaneous small societies, obstructing each other and causing infinite waste, would find a more beneficent employment in this common organisation. Then two great and influential classes would come to our aid. Besides many cases in which female investigation and advice are indispensable, the entire work of charitable visitation is, with some exceptions, suited to the feminine character and qualifications ; and the assistance of respectable working men

\* For the eleventh week of the quarter.

and women, with their practical knowledge of the poor, and their just influence over the classes below them, would be invaluable. The constitution of English society is highly favourable to an organisation of this sort. We are a people of unbroken traditions. We have never undergone a cataclysm like the French Revolution; and the feudal feeling, under the modern form of ‘the respect due to the position of a gentleman,’ is still strong among us. English society is built in successive layers, each of which exercises great influence over the one below it; and every class above the lowest shares in this power and responsibility.

All who are now employed as visitors under the clergy of every persuasion would take their places in the new organisation; while the clergy themselves would enter into intimate relations with the district committees, aiding them by their advice and influence, and by the material assistance they would procure for them from their congregations, and referring to them every case which appeared to require attention. The advantages of this arrangement are described as follows by the large and able Committee which reported in 1868 on the condition of the poorer classes of Edinburgh:—

1<sup>st</sup>. Every man, whatever his religious opinions may be, is free to unite with others in prosecuting this great work of charity, which can only be successful when promoted by that systematic and thorough co-operation by which such great results have been achieved in other departments of human labour.

2<sup>nd</sup>. It sets free ministers of religion, missionaries, and Bible-women, whose peculiar duty it is to attend to the spiritual wants of the poor, from stimulating that tendency to hypocrisy and dissimulation which is sure to follow the footsteps even of the most discerning minister of religion, when he seeks to act also as the distributor of his own or others’ charity.\*

\* To strengthen the opinion of the impolicy and danger to the poor of the same agents being employed to minister both in temporal and in spiritual things, your Committee request special attention to the three following extracts:—

*Dr. Chalmers* said—‘Your ladies go about among the poor with a tract in one hand and a shilling in the other. How *can* their eye be single? It just keeps veering from the tract to the shilling.’ And again—

‘It has never been enough adverted to, that a process for Christianising the people is sure to be tainted and enfeebled when there is allied with it a process

3rd. In so far as the efforts of lay agencies are successful in alleviating the temporal condition of the poor, they remove many obstacles to the reception of the Gospel, and open the way for the ministers of religion to exercise their more peculiar functions; for, to whatever extent the sense of neglect and the pressure of severe want is removed, to that extent will the ground be the better prepared for the reception of the precious seed which it is the privilege of the clergy to sow.

When the irregular levies of charity have thus been converted into an organised army, there will be two, and only two, forces in the field moving on parallel lines against pauperism; one supported by a compulsory tax, and acting according to rules prescribed by law or official authority, and the other instinct with the vigour and varied applicability which belong to voluntary action. Cordial and effective co-operation would thus become possible. But for this purpose it is absolutely necessary that there should be no supplementing of Poor-Law relief by charity, or of charity by Poor-Law relief. Each of the two agencies must be exclusively responsible for its own portion of the field of action. There should be unlimited exchange of information; and the cases themselves should be freely transferred from one to the other, accordingly as they appear to be better suited to Poor-Law or charitable relief. Possibly, as Poor-Law Guardians become sensible of the necessity of scrutinising the cases which lie on the border line of legal and charitable relief, and of preventing, as well as relieving, pauperism, they may allow their officers to act in the same cadres with the Visitors, so as to combine, for the benefit of for alimenting the people; there lies a moral impossibility in the way of accomplishing these two objects, by the working of one and the same machinery.'

*Dr. Guthrie*, in his address delivered in London in December 1867, thus endorses the same sentiment:—'Experience has taught me, and many besides, that when the minister of religion is known as an almoner of charity, it leads to an extraordinary amount of pretence and hypocrisy, to something no better than prison religion; and of all religions that which prisons foster is the worst.'

*Mrs. Ranyard*, the founder of the Bible-Women's Mission, says:—'We never think it right to dispense relief by the hand of a Bible-woman, if we can help it. It is not that we do not trust her, but it hinders her true usefulness.'

It may be further noted, that the 'Scripture Readers' Society,' and other societies in England, have been forced, by experience, rigorously to adhere to this principle.

both, the qualities of a regular, with those of a volunteer establishment. This arrangement would be especially applicable to the East-End, St. Giles's, and other poor districts, where, if anywhere, there might be a deficiency of unpaid Visitors.

The entire organisation must be the work of the District Committees. This Council may inform and advise, but the District Committees alone possess the local knowledge and influence required for the task. To them it belongs, both to construct the machine, and to work it after it has been constructed. Their first duty will be to make themselves acquainted with the ample information on record on the subject; and then to arrange, with the clergy of every persuasion, with the Guardians, and with other influential inhabitants, the particular model best suited to their respective districts. There is one point on which the utmost caution will be necessary. At the commencement of the system inexperienced Visitors will be brought into connection with a population which has extensively graduated in the arts of mendicancy; and, in order to prevent the reproduction of old abuses under a new form, the common rule of all these organisations should be strictly enforced—that *the duty of the Visitor is to report the circumstances of each case to his or her Committee, for their decision, and afterwards to give such relief as may be authorised by the Committee, but, except in extreme cases, on no account to give, even at his or her expense, any relief without the previous sanction of the Committee.* This rule cannot be too soon or too decidedly promulgated. The comfort of all concerned, and especially of the female Visitors—indeed, the success of the whole plan—depends upon it. One of the advantages of the varied agency of which our Society consists, is, that the same experiment may be made in different ways, according to local facilities and aptitudes. Among so many District Committees some will be in advance on one point and some on another, and all will profit by the experience of each. By fully considering this subject, and working it out in all its parts, any single Committee might at the present time confer a signal benefit on the whole metropolis.

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